

# Director's Remarks, February 2010

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## Performance

Despite substantial changes to our book budget in accordance with new Board policies, we did worse in terms of circulating materials last month than we did the same month last year. In analyzing the numbers, tripling the Juvenile book budget has had no effect on the number of children's items checked out. Reductions in expenditures for practical and college level resources have resulted in reduced check outs of nonfiction materials.

Our previous collection strategy was to monitor and serve the complex and varied needs of the people who came into our buildings. The new strategy was to serve only three key interests of the overall population, as determined by the consultants' one-page survey report (as voted on by the Library Task Force and Library Board). The theory was that, by putting all our funds in the three subject areas of highest demand, we would provide much better service to the majority of our citizens than we did by dividing the few funds available in many categories. This may be true, but it has no effect on our performance if the only people we serve are those we had been serving already.

## Liability for Retiree Health Care

The City has told us that it is our problem to solve and Daisy Madison recommends that we request funding to cover it in our budget request. Under the circumstances, it does not matter whether the City is legally required to collect these funds or should treat us like a City department and cover it themselves. We have no assurance that we will eventually be treated as a City department, or that presumed debts would not come out of our budget even if we did.

## Renovating Downtown (Board vote requested)

The Library should close most of its Downtown Branch down for renovation and restore the branches to 5 days a week. The Library needs a grand gesture that will generate excitement and invite the general public into our buildings. The Public Library Downtown is continuing to decline in use and generates just a few more circulations a month over 7 days than the Northgate facility generates over 4 days. The piecemeal reduction in government documents and slow shifting of materials while we are open will take a long time and a lot more money than closing these areas down and focusing our attention on them. We could operate a popular library and public computers from one service desk on the main Floor, block off everything but the fire escapes, rest rooms, and Children's on the second Floor, and everything but administration, the rest rooms, and Local History on the third Floor. Three or more employees could be sent out to the branches to restore a 5-day schedule, and the rest of the Fine Arts, BST, and Reference employees could manage one desk together over another 5- or 6-day schedule (Monday-Thursday & Saturday or Saturday – Thursday). In order to make the most of this, the Library Board would need to go after renovation/reorganization funds which ideally would include automation funds as well. The end result would be an exciting and permanent change, a leaner and better performing library system.

## **Brainerd, Automation, and a Meeting with the Two Mayors**

From discussions at the last Eastgate Library Action Committee meeting and from Cliff Hightower's report in *The Times Free Press*, it appears that the Brainerd library development is moving forward, may involve some private funding, and the final location is unknown. Under the circumstances, it would be impossible to know what to include for it in our capital request or when to add it. However, automation is a major and expensive emergency for us. Not only is our 1995 software completely out of date and no longer being repaired, but it was designed for a very expensive server that is well past its service life. When the server fails, the only way we will be able to stay in business is by replacing it with another expensive server or going for the better part of a year without a circulation system while we brought a newly funded replacement online. We need to know what agreement we can find from the two mayors about retiree health care costs and automation before we agree on a budget request in March. If we gain no traction on automation, it is time we did it piecemeal or with private funding.

## **EbscoHost (Board vote requested)**

The Library requests Board support for the annual renewal of all our EbscoHost databases and an Ebsco replacement for our search aggregator for a total cost of \$83,245.

Upset by fear that online databases were reducing their subscription sales, major publishers of the most popular magazines had threatened to withdraw their current and back issues from online vendors unless they got a much higher price for access. EbscoHost was the only major online vendor to arrange a deal. The State of Tennessee Tel contract will lose access to all these periodicals (e.g. Time and affiliates) at the end of this calendar year. Our new EbscoHost contract covers the next fiscal year and a pro-rated gap for those due to expire in March.

The biggest difference between magazine vendors is the quantity of magazines they carry and the quality. Most states (40+) have opted for quality (choosing EbscoHost over Gale), because they look at use statistics and know that certain magazines are used more than others. A few states have bid documents that focus on quantity instead (choosing Gale over EbscoHost), but face a tough sale from state legislators over very poor use statistics. All the large cities in Tennessee pay separately for EbscoHost, because use statistics/dollars per use justify the purchase and they depend on 24/7 online users for much of their service. More than any other city in Tennessee, we rely on providing outstanding online materials to make up for our lack of hours.

It is very likely that more than half of our total "book" budget will be devoted to licensed (copyrighted) material available for download online and this purchase falls within budgeted funds without taking any money away from book and media purchases this year.